

Increasing Access to Local Produce

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When thinking about emissions that contribute to global warming, it is likely that the first images in your head are of power plants spewing plumes of smoke into the air or crowded highways hazy with heat and exhaust. You may not as quickly think of rows of green vegetables growing in the sun. But the truth is that in today's world, the food supply chain is responsible for 26% of human-created greenhouse gas emissions.[\[1\]](#)

With this in mind, our team set out to address the significant contribution that food – particularly its transportation – makes to emissions. Out of a variety of avenues through which to approach this problem, we settled on a narrower focus of promoting local produce, since there are certain fruits and vegetables that tend to be much higher in carbon intensity due to growing and transportation practices. To figure out where we could add value, our team set out to discover the measures already taken by HBS to promote responsible food sourcing activities. It turns out that HBS is on the ball. Restaurant Associates, HBS's food service provider, already contracts with food suppliers who are committed to providing locally-sourced produce and who have turned their attention to this problem. HBS also supports green roofs on several of its buildings, which supply the community with a variety of fresh vegetables and herbs.

Inspired by several other Harvard schools that have already successfully built gardens, along with Harvard's [Sustainable and Healthful Food Standards](#), we came up with the idea to work on a self-sustaining, scalable, and educational community garden at HBS.



EDUCATION AND FOOD LITERACY

- Implement a comprehensive food education campaign that enhances food literacy on campus, including strategies like peer-to-peer education, signage, and labeling.

Our objective was to generate a plan for a visible community garden on the HBS campus that provides educational signage about the benefits of local produce, engages the community, provides a space for people to garden, and yields local produce for the benefit of the community. To figure out the logistics and operations of a community garden, we met with representatives from existing Harvard gardens, Restaurant Associates, HBS Facilities, and engaged staff members who would be interested in utilizing the space. After the set of meetings, we settled on a proposed location for a garden, developed cost estimates and proposed two potential models for moving forward.

Under the first proposed model, the school would build and own the community garden, its landscaping contractor would maintain the garden, and community engagement and education



would be driven through a series of staff- and volunteer-led events, including planting and harvesting events. Under the second proposed model, staff members would be encouraged to buy into a specific plot (or box) and maintain and harvest their own plot. In either scenario, specific attention would be paid to the selection of planted vegetables, with an eye toward existing carbon-intensive vegetables that require extensive transportation for delivery, such as asparagus. This would enable the garden to highlight the importance of encouraging local supply and sourcing of what are otherwise more damaging, carbon-intensive varieties. In addition, the garden would be configured as raised beds in the form of above-ground planters to prevent invasion by pests and animals and to allow the garden to be movable and modular.

The reception of faculty and staff to the proposed gardens was positive, and their feedback helped strengthen each of our proposed models through new suggestions for location, use, and funding of the gardens. Our team hopes to see increased adoption of locally-grown food on the HBS campus in the near future!

[1] Poore and Nemeck, "Reducing food's environmental impacts through producers and consumers." *Science*, 2018.